

Voluntary Agricultural Districts

Protecting Catawba County Farmland



In the past 40 years, Catawba County has lost over 40,000 acres of farmland. The number of farms also decreased by 64%.



10,000 acres of farmland were lost in the five-year period of 1992-97.





Catawba County Farm Facts

(source: 1997 Census of Agriculture)

- 13th in barley production
- 15th in beef cows
- 21st for all cattle
- 21st for milk cows
- 596 farms in the county
- 72,264 acres in agriculture
- Average farm size = 121 acres
- Average age of farmers = 58 years
- Cash Receipts = \$36,919,000 (1999)

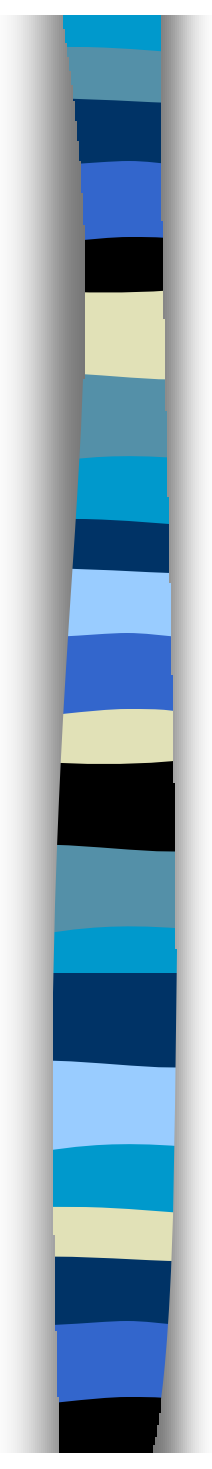
Voluntary agricultural districts offer farmers an option in preserving their property in its current use.



25 other counties currently have voluntary districts in place.

Districts are authorized by State General Statute 106-735 to 106-744 and Chapter 153A





Why is Catawba County considering voluntary agricultural districts?

- At this time, just a proposal; looking for input from the farming community
- If farmers are interested, Board of Commissioners would consider adopting an ordinance
- Board of Commissioners want to assist farmers in staying in the farm business
- Provides a way to advertise pride in our farming heritage



What are the benefits to farmers?

- Farmland will be identified as part of an agricultural district – source of pride
- Public hearing required before condemnation proceedings can begin against farmland
- Water & sewer fees held in abeyance
- Opportunity for nuisance claims against farmers will be reduced

What would be required to enroll?

- Make sure your farm meets the minimum requirements
- Submit an application to the Advisory Board for enrollment





State requirements for enrollment:

- Farm must qualify for present-use tax program
- Must meet NRCS guidelines for management or have been actively farmed for 5 years previous
- If highly erodible land exists, must meet NRCS requirements for that land
- Be the subject of a 10 year conservation agreement between the owner and the county



Local enrollment option requirements being considered

- Must meet minimum acreage requirement
 - Minimum of 20 contiguous acres for a single farm to be considered a district
 - Two or more farms which contain a minimum of 20 acres within one mile of each other
- Proposed to be administered by Planning Department with technical assistance from SWCD, NRCS, Forest Service and CES



Advisory Board

- Proposed to consist of 9 members: 7 from the small area planning districts, 1 from SWCD board, 1 from Farm Bureau
- All members must be actively engaged in farming
- Lists of potential board members can be submitted by Extension Service, SWCD, NRCS, Farm Bureau, Forest Service, FSA and other farming related agencies



Proposed Roles of Advisory Board

- Review applications for voluntary agricultural districts
- Conduct public hearings on proposed condemnation of farmland
- Advise Board of Commissioners on issues affecting farms/farmers
- Provide input on county policies affecting farmers such as the tax schedule for present-use program

What the program will not do:

- You will not lose control of your land nor will you lose any development rights by participating. ***It's a voluntary program!***



This is not
zoning!



Can a Farmer Withdraw From the Program?

- Yes. Send written statement to the Advisory Board that you no longer wish to participate in the program



Where do we go from here?

- Based on interest from farming community, staff will proceed with completing drafting ordinance
- Presentation to Board of Commissioners for review and public hearing
- Board adopts ordinance
- Farmers can begin applying for district designation

Questions, Suggestions
Your input is needed!!!

